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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KN](#) [SN](#)
SUBJECT: SINGAPORE DIPLOMATS OFFER READOUT ON RECENT TRIP
TO PYONGYANG

Classified By: Econ/Pol Counselor Joel Ehrendreich for reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: North Korea has begun paying more attention to economic issues and is keen to improve relations with the United States, MFA Northeast Asia Deputy Director Loh Tuck Wai told Econ/PolCouns in a readout of a Singapore delegation's late November visit to Pyongyang. Led by MFA Second Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan, the Singaporeans encouraged North Korea to seize the diplomatic opportunity presented by recent U.S. contacts, return to the Six-Party Talks, and begin opening up its economic policy to foster development and better integration with the region. Given Singapore's friendly but limited relations with the DPRK, however, Singapore remains uncertain of its influence over North Korean decision-making. End Summary.

¶2. (C) North Korea has begun paying more attention to economic issues and is keen to improve relations with the United States, MFA Northeast Asia Deputy Director Loh Tuck Wai told Econ/PolCouns. He based these observations on a late November visit to Pyongyang, where he accompanied MFA's Second Permanent Secretary Bilahari Kausikan to meetings with North Korean officials. The trip was Bilahari's third visit to Pyongyang and the first visit for the other members of his delegation. Though North Korea has an embassy in Singapore, Singapore has no reciprocal mission and no accredited ambassador in Pyongyang. Bilahari's trip was therefore intended to maintain normal diplomatic relations via the contacts made on his inaugural DPRK visit in 2006, as well as to give some less senior MFA personnel first-hand exposure to North Korea to help them with their policy work. Apart from a courtesy call on DPRK Foreign Minister Pak Ui Chun, the Singapore delegation met with Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Yong Il and Vice-Minister of Foreign Trade Ri Myong San.

¶3. (C) Bilahari tried to impress upon the North Koreans that they cannot rely solely on military means to ensure their survival and that they must also pursue economic development and integration with the rest of the region, according to Loh. The North Koreans expressed interest in attracting investment from Singapore, and the Singaporeans had to explain that only individual businessmen could make investment decisions. The North Koreans also indicated a desire to import more consumer goods.

¶4. (C) Bilahari urged the North Koreans to seize "with both hands" the diplomatic opportunity provided by recent contacts with the United States, Loh said. The Singapore delegation came away with the impression that North Korea genuinely wants to improve relations with the United States but would rather pursue a bilateral agenda than work within the Six-Party Talks. Bilahari told the North Koreans that in order to join in regional economic integration, North Korea would have to allay its neighbors' concerns about security

and proliferation, and he encouraged North Korea to return to the Six-Party Talks. But "at the end of the day," Loh added, "we're not sure how much influence we have."

15. (C) Loh characterized Singapore's bilateral relations with North Korea as "fine" on the political level, but the two countries lack a substantial trade relationship. Singapore is interested in seeing North Korea move away from militarism and open up its economic policy, two necessary steps to create the conditions for expanded Singapore-DPRK trade and investment. To assist this process, Singapore provides North Korean officials with Singapore-based training in information technology, English, and other capacity-building subjects. Singapore sees the North Koreans as highly intelligent and capable of accomplishing whatever they set their minds to, Loh said, citing their ability to develop nuclear weapons as an example, but their policy-making is held back by their quasi-religious political system.

16. (C) Loh said Pyongyang looked better than he expected and compared it to the Vietnam of ten or 15 years ago. The Singapore diplomats did not leave Pyongyang except for one excursion to a museum outside the city where the government displays the diplomatic gifts received by Kim Jong Il and his late father. The delegation was well aware that they saw what the North Korean regime wanted them to see.

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